

REMARKS ON AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED BY THE

PRESIDENT OF THE ROYAL COLLEGE
OF PHYSICIANS,

ON THE 11TH APRIL, 1870.



BY

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TO THE MEMBERS
OF THE
COURT OF EXAMINERS
OF THE
SOCIETY OF APOTHECARIES.

AN Address by the President of the Royal College of Physicians, delivered to the Fellows on the 11th April, and since printed at their request, conveys, as I consider, so erroneous a representation of the course pursued by the Society of Apothecaries in the recent Conferences relative to the formation of a conjoint Board of Examination for England, that I am induced briefly to call your attention to it.

It is not necessary to dwell on the position which, during the last half-century, has been held by the Society of Apothecaries in connexion with the education and examination of General Medical Practitioners.

It is not asserting too much to say that it is mainly due to the temperate and enlightened regulations which have been originated by this Society that the system of Medical Education has been raised

to its present condition, and that the country is now served by a body of skilful and honoured practitioners of Medicine such as are not excelled in any nation of Europe.

The Society are not unmindful of the large diffusion of knowledge in modern days throughout the country, and of the improvements which have been introduced in the manner of testing this knowledge. They admit the necessity of still further improvement in the means by which the attainments of candidates for licence to practise Medicine may be raised, and they recognize the necessity of an uniform standard of Examination in each of the several divisions of the Kingdom.

They have ever been willing to combine their efforts to those ends with those of other Medical authorities; but after their long course of usefulness and approved success, it cannot be supposed that they will consent to be remitted to the comparatively inferior position which they held in bygone days, before the important functions which they now discharge were entrusted to them.

This degradation has, however, been sought to be effected, and it is imputed to the Society that by the assertion of unreasonable claims they have obstructed the design for the formation of a conjoint Board of Examiners.

At the first Conference, which took place at the College of Physicians on the 12th February, it was seriously proposed that for the future the Examiners

to be contributed by the Society of Apothecaries to the Conjoint Board should be restricted to the subjects of Pharmacy, Medical Botany, and Midwifery. In a subsequent scheme, Chemistry and Forensic Medicine were allotted to them in addition.

The representatives of the Society considered that to accept such proposals, to the exclusion of the Science and Practice of Medicine—the subject specially assigned to them by the Act of 1815—would be virtually to admit that their Court of Examiners had hitherto exercised functions for which they were unfitted, and that the many thousands of their Licentiates, very many of whom occupy distinguished positions in general practice and in the public services, were in future to be regarded as an inferior class.

They therefore claimed to participate (though to a very moderate extent) in the nomination of Examiners in Medicine.

This claim is now denounced by the College of Physicians as an immoderate pretension, and it is declared to be unreasonable that Members and Licentiates of the Colleges, as well as gentlemen preparing for graduation at the English Universities, should be required to pass an examination conducted by Apothecaries.

If the proposed combined Board of Examiners were truly designated by this language (which it certainly is not), it might still be asked what greater indignity would be offered to those Gentlemen

by an examination in Medicine by a Board thus constituted, than by a like examination in the other subjects.

That no such feeling exists among students of Medicine is attested by the fact that during the last three years not less than 30 of the Graduates and Undergraduates of the Universities of Oxford, Cambridge, and London, 20 or more gentlemen holding the Licence, or having passed the first Examination of the Royal College of Physicians, two of the Fellows, and a very large number of the Members of the Royal College of Surgeons, applied for, and after due examination, have obtained the Licence of the Society.*

A plea has been advanced that clinical facts (which are admitted to be an essential element in an examination in Medicine) are at the command of the College of Physicians alone, but this is quite unfounded, seeing that effective clinical examination has been regularly practised at the Society's examinations during the last three years, and the resources at their command would enable them to enlarge such examinations to an unlimited extent.

Since the Conferences above alluded to took place the subject has assumed an entirely new aspect by the intervention of the Government, and by a Bill for the future regulation of the profession having been submitted to Parliament. It was fully anticipated

* *It will be understood that these numbers are exclusive of Scotch and Irish Candidates.*

by the Society that legislation would be found indispensable in order to effect the desired changes, and they considered the provisions of the Government Bill, as originally framed, to be, for the most part, well calculated to effect the purpose.

The Society trust that, in the Conferences which must shortly ensue in the event of the Bill becoming law, they will be met by the other medical authorities in the spirit of liberality and concession by which they are themselves actuated, and the President and Fellows of the Royal College of Physicians may rest assured that in the selection of Members of the future Combined Examining Board, the Society will not fail to nominate gentlemen worthy to represent the great and honourable body of General Practitioners, and fully deserving of the confidence and respect of the other Members of the Board.

